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SUBJECT: PRESIDENT OF MONTENEGRO VIEWS ON KEY ISSUES

Classified By: Ambassador Robert A. Bradtke for reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: During a relaxed June 22 lunch in Podgorica with Charge Barnes and visiting Ambassador Bradtke, Montenegro President Vujanovic discussed bilateral, regional, and domestic issues. Vujanovic, who had just returned from the Southeastern Europe Energy Summit in Zagreb, described Russian President Putin, who was also in Zagreb, as "very firm" on opposition to the Athisaari plan on Kosovo. Vujanovic expressed strong concern about the impact of problems in Kosovo on Montenegro and throughout the region. On bilateral issues, Vujanovic spoke positively of his recent trip to Washington and relations with the U.S., but was troubled by efforts to obtain pardon for American citizens of Albanian descent, even before their trial concludes. On relations with Croatia, Vujanovic cited President Mesic as the leading statesman of the region and reiterated his commitment to a policy of reconciliation. End Summary.

¶2. (C) On June 22, Charge Barnes and visiting Ambassador Bradtke joined President Vujanovic for lunch, at his invitation, at a restaurant on the outskirts of Podgorica. Vujanovic, who had just returned from the Southeastern Europe Energy Summit in Zagreb, described the meeting as a positive, if general, exchange on the common problems of the region in ensuring future energy supplies. Addressing Montenegro's specific situation, Vujanovic commented that the country imported almost 40 percent of its energy, and expressed great concern about future energy policy. In this context, he criticized the Montenegrin parliament for canceling the proposed privatization of the country's thermal power plant. This privatization and the expansion of the plant, he maintained, would have ensured sufficient power for Montenegro and possibly for export as well. The way ahead was now not clear, and if Montenegro faced energy shortages, the government and not the Parliament would end up being blamed by the Montenegrin people. Asked about renewable sources of energy, Vujanovic described plans for wind power and additional hydro power as reflecting only the view of the Economics Minister rather than the broader cabinet.

¶3. (C) Noting that he had spoken with Russian President Putin in Zagreb, Vujanovic described him as "very firm" on Kosovo and insisting that any solution had to be accepted by both Belgrade and Pristina. Montenegro, Vujanovic said, was in a "very delicate" position on Kosovo, given its large Serb population and its significant Albanian minority. A further concern was the danger that unrest in Kosovo could spread throughout the region, particularly to southern Serbia and Macedonia.

¶4. (C) As a result, Montenegro's official position on Kosovo was that it was neither for nor against the Athisaari plan. That said, the President offered his "personal view" that there was no alternative to Kosovo independence, given the policy that President Milosevic had carried out. But it was difficult to see a clear way ahead. President Tadic,

Vujanovic opined, understood the reality of the current situation, but the Serb leadership had not prepared the public for Kosovo independence, and Prime Minister Kostunica was even using the Kosovo issue to stir up problems with Serbs in Montenegro. Referring to the upcoming meeting between President Bush and President Putin, Vujanovic mused that perhaps the United States and Russia could bring the parties together in a Dayton-style negotiation to force a settlement.

¶15. (C) On bilateral relations with the United States, Vujanovic spoke positively of his meetings during his recent trip to Washington. While there had been criticism in Montenegro over his signing of the Status of Forces Agreement and Montenegro's Article 98 agreement, both these had been in Montenegro's interest and the political "storm" had passed. The President hoped that both economic and military relations would expand, and referred in upbeat terms to his hopes for development of the state partnership with the Maine National Guard. Vujanovic also reiterated his aspiration to see Montenegro eventually join NATO, while noting that membership in the EU would be an even more distant goal.

¶16. (C) The one bilateral issue of concern, Vujanovic observed, was the ongoing trial of Americans of Albanian descent. The sooner this trial could be concluded the better, he said, adding that a member of the U.S. Congress had been in touch with the Montenegrin Ambassador to the U.S. to urge that he pardon the accused even before the conclusion of the trial. A similar request had been made by one of the Albanian parties in Montenegro. Vujanovic explained that he could not agree to such a step, which would undermine Montenegro's judicial system. The trial had to proceed and only when a verdict was reached, could the issue of pardon be

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considered. Vujanovic said that he had met with family members and representatives of the Americans on trial.

¶17. (C) Relatedly, Vujanovic commented that the Albanian community in Montenegro differs from Albanians elsewhere in the depth of the divide on religious grounds. In Albania, nationalism was stronger than religion, but in Montenegro, the differences between Albanian Catholics and Muslims were so strong that in one local community, Albanian Catholics were having difficulty obtaining permission for a cemetery. Vujanovic said that he had asked Albanian President Moisu, whom he holds in high regard, and Cardinal Meissner of Cologne, who visited last week, to intercede, but he was not optimistic about progress.

¶18. (C) Asked about bilateral relations with Croatia, Vujanovic reiterated that he wanted to see reconciliation between Croatia and Montenegro, noting that his willingness to consider some kind of reparations for Montenegrin attacks on Dubrovnik had been strongly criticized by the Serb parties in Montenegro. Vujanovic had particular praise for Croatian President Mesic, whom he described as the leading statesman in Southeastern Europe. Mesic had urged Vujanovic to consider hosting a summit meeting of Southeastern Europe Presidents to follow up on the Zagreb Summit.

¶19. (C) In a brief exchange on the Montenegrin constitution, Vujanovic expressed disappointment with the fact that "emotional" issues such as national symbols and language had come to dominate the debate. On language, he had offered a compromise proposal (Montenegrin-Serbian or Montenegrin-Croatian) only to have these ideas rejected by all sides.

¶10. (C) This cable has been drafted jointly with Embassy Podgorica and is being transmitted from Zagreb since Embassy Podgorica does not have classified communications.
BRADTKE